

## ENLISTED RETENTION

The dynamics of our manpower system must match skills and grades to our commanders' needs throughout the operating forces. The Marine Corps endeavors to attain and maintain stable, predictable retention patterns. However, civilian opportunities abound for our Marines as private employers actively solicit our young Marine leaders for lucrative private sector employment. Intangibles, such as the desire to serve our nation and the satisfaction received from leadership responsibilities provided in our Corps, are a large part of the reason we retain the dedicated men and women who choose to continue to be active duty Marines after their initial commitment. Retention success is also partly a consequence of the investment we make in supporting our operational forces – giving our Marines what they need to do their jobs in the field, as well as the funds required to educate and train these phenomenal men and women.

We are ever mindful of enlisted retention issues. Our enlisted force is the backbone of our Corps and we make every effort to retain our best people. Although we are experiencing minor turbulence in a few specialties, the aggregate enlisted retention situation is extremely healthy. Some shortages exist in high-tech Military Occupational Specialties that represent an important part of our warfighting capability, primarily because these young Marines remain in high demand in the civil sector.

We are a young force, making accessions a chief concern for manpower readiness. Of the 154,600 active duty enlisted force, over 26,000 are still teenagers – and 104,000 are on their first enlistment. In FY 2003, we reenlisted 25 percent of our first term eligible population. These 6,120 first term Marines represent 100% of the Marines we need to transition into the career force, and marks the tenth consecutive year that the Corps will have achieved

this objective.

With the support of Selective Reenlistment Bonuses, we were able to achieve our first term retention requirement with an “MOS match” rate of 99.6%.

Prior to FY 2002, we were encountering a slight increase in the number of first-term Marines we needed to reenlist each year. This was



caused by a consistent trend of slightly lower retention among career Marines. To counter this rising first term reenlistment requirement, we have focused greater attention on retaining Marines in their sixth through twelfth years of service. The Subsequent Term Alignment Plan (STAP) was introduced in FY 2002 to focus on retaining experience. The first year of STAP proved to be a huge success, with a 96% MOS match. In FY 2003, we achieved a 94 percent MOS match that, although less than the initial year of STAP, we still consider a great success for this young program.

The decreasing trend in continuation rates has been stabilized and will continue to stabilize our First Term Alignment Plan (FTAP) requirement to achievable levels. Due to the strong draw from the civilian sector, we elevated the importance of our career force by paying greater attention to retaining them as well as expending 40 percent of our SRB resources to keep this experience level on par with previous years.

This year we continue to see smaller first-term non-Expiration of Active Service (EAS) attrition, similar to the lower attrition experienced in fiscal years 2001 and 2002. The Crucible and the Unit Cohesion programs are contributing to improved retention among our young Marines who assimilate the cultural values of the Corps earlier in their career.

The impact of lower non-EAS attrition allowed us to reduce our accession mission in both FY 2002 and FY 2003, and we may be able to continue this trend in FY 2004. The "downside" to this situation is that our

success has increased the cost of our Manpower account by increasing the average length of service of individual Marines. However, these positive results have reduced the burden placed on our recruiters, while concurrently providing our force with more experienced Marines.

In the larger context, we are extremely pleased with our retention situation. We anticipate meeting our aggregate personnel objectives in FY 2005, and we continue to successfully maintain the appropriate balance of first-term and career Marines. The management of youth and experience in our enlisted ranks is critical to our success and we are extremely proud of our accomplishments.

We attack our specialty shortages with the highly successful Selective Reenlistment Bonus (SRB) program. Shortages persist in some highly technical specialties, such as intelligence, data communications experts, and air command and control technicians. Currently, the Marine Corps has allotted \$51.8M in FY 2004 in new SRB payments to assist our reenlistment efforts. These payments have been split 60/40 between the FTAP and STAP, respectively. The SRB program has significantly aided our reenlistment rates and improved retention for some of our critical skill shortages. In FY 2004, we are continuing to pay lump sum bonus payments, thus increasing the net present value of the incentive and positively influencing highly qualified, yet previously undecided, personnel. It is a powerful incentive for the undecided to witness another Marine's reenlistment and award of SRB in the total amount.